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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard
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"Saying it like it is!"

Well, we survived another major snowstorm here in the northeast, almost a foot of snow in our area! Yes, I'm sick of it all, as well as the cold temperatures. Thankfully, we're getting at least a short respite and expecting warmer temps for a couple of days this weekend. But, I want more! I'm ready for Spring!

Y'know, we're all tired of the bad economic news these days. Unemployment is rising at an extremely alarming rate, prices of many things keep going up, the stock market (and our savings) is plummeting, and more. It's truly sad.

What makes me even more mad are the exorbitant and outrageous "salaries" that some "chosen" folks make - like actors, sports figures, and CEOs. It's really sickening, but it's been accepted for so many years that many don't think twice about it. Hmmm, maybe now that so many are out of work and losing their homes, it hits home? And what makes it worse are what is labeled as a "bonus". Banks and the big 3 car companies are failing, and getting bailed out (by us). Part of the deal in these actions is no "gold parachute" for the respective executives. But what about execs from other companies? Should companies be paying CEOs big bonuses while the common man is looking for work to be able to put food on his/her family's table and keep a roof over their head?

In this week's issue there's a piece on Google giving huge bonuses to four of its top executives. We're talking 7-digit figures! Sorry, I think it's ridiculous during "normal" times, but in today's economic troubles, it's a real slap in the face. How do these people sleep at night, and look at themselves in the mirror? What's the matter, their over-inflated salaries aren't high enough? Really disgusting.

So, have I ticked you off enough yet? I hope so. If it weren't for the countless numbers of everyday workers that would lose their jobs, I'd wish to learn that some of these companies were headed for financial failures, just to see these executives have to justify their existence. Then again, they're likely set for life financially anyway, so what would be the point?

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Man, this week just flew by! And I'm not really sure of where it all went! We had some snow over the weekend, but the advertised 'storm of the season' turned out (thankfully) to be only average for us.

There really aren't enough messages in the NewsGroup this week for a column, so I'll just put 'em in a folder to be added to next week's.

Let's see... what else can we talk about?

Politics? Politics is... well, politics. There's always something to say about that, but I vented last week, so I'll go easy this time around. Let me just say that I think we're moving in the right direction in a multitude of ways, and leave it at that, okay?

The economy. Oy. What is there to say about the economy that hasn't been said a dozen times already by multitudes of people. I guess that all I can say, like Kevin Bacon's character in Animal House, is 'Remain calm! All is well!'

Now it looks like General Motors may well 'go under'. Well, if that's what's going to happen, I wish we could get back the billions we've already poured into them. In truth, though, I think what'll happen is that they'll declare bankruptcy for protection from creditors and then, because they're the major customer for many of their suppliers, continue the buyer/supplier relationship. This will happen mainly because the suppliers have little choice but to continue dealing with their main (if not only) customer. From there, GM will be able to ask for and receive price breaks and concessions that will hurt the suppliers, but ultimately allow them to stay in business.

I don't see GM as being broken up and sold piecemeal. Who could/would buy enough of it to make a difference? So they're pretty much stuck with themselves. And then there are the 'executives'. Those guys making major MAJOR dollars while the company goes down the tubes. No, it's not ALL their fault that things have gone so badly. For instance, if it hadn't been for the skyrocketing gas prices last year the sale of SUVs, their big-profit products, would probably still be selling very briskly. But they DID engineer the market to provide themselves with the best profit possible... they make a better profit on SUVs than anything else they sell except for what they sell to the government. So it WAS their fault that when the bottom fell out of the SUV market that they had little else to fall back on. No one can plan for EVERY contingency, I know. But did really take an Einstein to look at the situation and say, "big gas-guzzler... possible gas price increase... hmmm... that would be a bad combination"?

Of course, you KNOW where they'll end up... blaming labor for the problems. 'Yeah, those union guys are sucking the company dry'. Well unfortunately (if you're management) it just ain't so. These are the people who MAKE your product. Without them, you're just a bunch of suits and ties making a lot of noise and a lot of money.

I have problems with unions too, so they're not getting away scott-free. There are many things that unions have done just to flex their muscles and show that they wield power. I can't blame them for that, but their main focus is still the union member... the working guy... so I'll cut them some slack. Besides, they HAVE already made concessions.

So I guess that, after billions of taxpayer dollars, the real question is 'can we afford to lose GM'. I think we COULD... I mean, it'd bring hard times for a lot of people and a lot of communities who count on the tax dollars the factories provide, but in the end the country would recover. On the other hand, it's the thought of no more '57 Chevys or Corvettes that will make you sad. They're... americana. Remember their theme from a couple of decades ago? Baseball, hot dogs, apple pie and Chevrolet? 'Nuff said.

Perhaps, if GM (and the other two major American car manufacturers) can come out of this intact, they'll have learned something and they'll have found their way back to what they once were. Maybe they'll remember that their product is autos and not stock shares.

Nahhhhhh, that's just crazy talk. [grin]

Well, I'm going to call it quits for now. I've saved this week's UseNet posts to add to next week's, and hopefully we'll have enough to give us something to talk about that IS Atari-related. Keep your fingers crossed, huh?

Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Resident Evil Red Hitting Stores!
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                                     Sega Takes Wii in New Directions!
                                     And more!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Sony's PSP Gets a New Look

Sony's redesigned PSP is rumored to be getting a new look. But all changes to this portable gaming device, expected to be released later

this year, are largely cosmetic.

The biggest change to the PSP's design is a sliding screen; as shown in a mock-up from VG247, it slides up to reveal various controls that are hidden beneath it when closed.

The new PSP, dubbed the PSP 4000, may be "significantly smaller in width," because of the new design, Eurogamer says.

According to reports, the PSP 4000 will have to be in the open position to play full-featured games, but there's no word on whether the rumored design includes game controllers or a keyboard underneath the screen. The 4000 may also allow you to play basic games, like LocoRoco, using the shoulder buttons (the L and R buttons at the top of the device) when the screen is closed.

This latest rumor comes after last week's news that the PSP may let go of its UMD drive to offload more bulk from the game system. Instead of the disc drive, Sony may look to sell games through the online PlayStation Store or perhaps even on Sony Memory Sticks. If the rumors are true, then the 4000 is a significant step forward for the PSP; however, the new PSP will still be based on current PSP tech with no improved graphics or gaming features. That being said, with the PSP 3000 and these new rumors, it's refreshing to hear about PSP updates that go beyond new colors, various entertainment bundles and incremental firmware updates.

The rumored release date for the 4000 is late 2009, and may be followed by a PSP2 in 2011 or 2012.

Resident Evil Red: Xbox 360 Limited Edition Hitting Stores

Microsoft's new Xbox 360's been spotted in the wild, per Endgadget, and as you've possibly heard, it's red. Why red? Probably because it's a limited edition of a bells-and-whistles Elite-caliber model due out simultaneous with the release of Capcom's survival horror blood-bonanza, Resident Evil 5. (It's certainly not an ad campaign for tomatoes, spaghetti, or ketchup.)

The official product page describes an "exclusive red finish" with a matching red wireless controller, plus all the other Elite goodies, Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix, and of course, a copy of Resident Evil 5 itself. All that available on March 13th for \$400, which is what the existing matte black model goes for with copies of LEGO Indiana Jones and Kung Fu Panda. Not half-bad, though a copy of Capcom's Street Fighter IV in lieu of II would've made it untouchable.

So what do you think. Red for blood? Fear? Anger? Sin? Guilt? Courage? Sacrifice? Or, since we know Chris is faintly critical of U.S. capitalism at the game's outset, maybe you scratch off one side and there's a hammer and sickle underneath?

Given the Endgadget snap, here's the thing: It seems Resident Evil 5's already in the wild (the wild being Pembroke Pines, Florida, anyway) two weeks early.

Bets on how long it'll take until someone breaks street?

Beatles Music Videogame Debuts in September

The Beatles will live anew in videogame glory beginning in September with the release of an exclusive "Rock Band" title that lets people pretend to be the legendary Fab Four.

The band's music label, Apple Corps, has veered from its aversion to digital distribution of music by working with Harmonix and MTV Games to create "The Beatles: Rock Band" slated to hit stores around the world on September 9.

Its creators promise that the game is "an unprecedented, experimental progression through and celebration of the music and artistry of The Beatles."

MTV Games had the title developed by US studio Harmonix, the maker of the hot-selling "Rock Band" videogames in which players using mock instruments as controllers win by keeping in tune with music and on-screen note cues.

Accessories sold along with The Beatles videogame will include faux instruments modeled after ones used by band members John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison and Ringo Starr.

McCartney and Starr, the surviving members of The Beatles, revealed in October that their songs will take on new lives in a videogame that lets people play out fantasies of being the world-changing 1960s British rockers.

"The project is a fun idea which broadens the appeal of The Beatles and their music," Sir Paul McCartney said in a release when plans for a game were announced. "I like people having the opportunity to get to know the music from the inside out."

The game will mark the first time the iconic band's music is featured in a videogame.

It was initially envisioned as a stand-alone title, but it was later decided it was shrewder to make it a special edition in the popular "Rock Band" franchise.

The concept for the videogame was honed with input from McCartney and Starr as well as from Yoko Ono and Olivia Harrison, the widows of John Lennon and George Harrison.

"It's cool," Yoko Ono said in October. "I love it and hope it will keep inspiring and encouraging the young generation for many decades."

The videogame is the band's long-awaited debut in the Internet Age because the surviving Beatles and their multimedia company have long resisted selling their music online in digital formats out of piracy concerns.

Versions of the videogame will be available for play on the three major consoles: Microsoft's Xbox 360, Sony's PlayStation 3, and Nintendo's Wii.

The game software will be priced at 60 dollars a copy in the United States and Beatles guitar controllers will have price tags of 100

dollars each.

Sega Takes Wii in New Directions

Real news from the virtual world:

* Romancing the Wii: More than two years after the launch of the Wii, most game publishers are still wrestling with the question of how to appeal to the broader, more casual audience that Nintendo has brought to the industry. Not Sega, though, which has this year's most impressive lineup of Wii releases - to some extent, more impressive than Nintendo itself.

"Sega was the first third-party publisher to believe in the Wii," says Sega of America President Simon Jeffery, and that head start gave it a big advantage. In particular, it allowed Sega to team up with Nintendo on "Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games," which sold more than 10 million copies worldwide.

Jeffery says Sega's games "tap into the same market that Nintendo opened" - particularly the lighthearted Sonic the Hedgehog series, which gets a new Wii installment this week called "Sonic and the Black Knight." "We understood Nintendo's premise of attracting casual gamers."

That said, Sega is still trying to appeal to hardcore gamers who have felt neglected by Nintendo. Jeffery estimates that "70 to 80 percent of Wii owners are young males, and there hasn't been much fodder for them on the Wii." The solution: grown-up action games like the gory brawler "MadWorld" (out next week) and the first-person shooter "The Conduit" (due in June), built from the ground up with the Wii in mind.

Whether the broader Wii audience will take to an ultraviolent spectacle like "MadWorld" is still in question. But all those people who bought the first "Mario & Sonic" mashup will still be happy: The mascots will reteam next year for "Mario & Sonic at the Winter Olympic Games," due just in time for the festivities in Vancouver, Canada, next February.

* Punch-Drunk: Nintendo's big Wii game for spring is "Punch-Out!!" the long-awaited revival of the goofy boxing game that was on everyone's Nintendo Entertainment System back in the 1980s. We finally have a U.S. arrival date: May 18. Before that, though, the company is squeaking out "ExciteBots: Trick Racing," which may give you a reason to dust off your Wii Wheel.

Also, fans of the supercute can get psyched for the U.S. debut of "The Legendary Starfy," the undersea adventures of a 7-year-old starfish.

* LittleBig PSP: Sony, meanwhile, is countering the impending launch of Nintendo's new portable DSi with a renewed push for the PlayStation Portable. At an event for retailers held in Arizona, Sony announced that two of its biggest franchises, "MotorStorm" and "LittleBigPlanet," will be moving to the PSP.

Sony's handheld will also be the home of fresh versions of MTV Games' "Rock Band" and Ubisoft's "Assassin's Creed," as well as a new Hannah Montana package from Disney.

* New in Stores: Microsoft's epic war-game franchise gets a strategic overhaul in "Halo Wars" (Xbox 360). ... Ubisoft's epic war-game franchise takes to the skies in "Tom Clancy's HAWX" (360, PlayStation 3). ... Spring training is here, and so are this season's baseball sims: 2K Sports' "Major League Baseball 2K9" (360, PS3, Wii, PlayStation 2) and Sony's "MLB 09: The Show" (PS3, PS2, PlayStation Portable).

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Google Pays Seven-Figure Bonuses to Four Top Execs

Four of Google Inc.'s top executives each received 2008 bonuses of more than \$1.2 million for helping the Internet search leader eke out modest earnings growth during a recession that battered much of corporate America.

The bonuses disclosed in a regulatory filing Tuesday were less than the awards doled out in 2007 when Google's profit rose 37 percent, dwarfing 2008's gain of 1 percent.

The Mountain View-based company's market value plunged by about \$120 billion, or 56 percent last year, reflecting concerns that the weakening economy will eviscerate the online advertising market that generates virtually all of Google's revenue.

Tuesday's filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission didn't include any information about the salaries or stock compensation paid to Google's top executives last year. Those disclosures are expected within the next few weeks when Google files its proxy statement.

Following company tradition, Google didn't pay bonuses to Chief Executive Eric Schmidt or co-founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin. Those three men are all billionaires, thanks to their large stock holdings in Google.

Jonathan Rosenberg, who oversees Google's products, received the largest bonus at \$1.64 million, a 3 percent decrease from 2007's incentive award of \$1.68 million.

Omid Kordestani, Google's top sales executive, and Alan Eustace, who oversees the company's engineers, each got bonuses of \$1.38 million, an 18 percent cut from \$1.68 million in 2007. The documents didn't elaborate on the reasons why the bonuses paid to Kordestani and Eustace were lowered more than Rosenberg's was.

Google gave a \$1.24 million to its chief financial officer, Patrick Pichette, for his contributions after joining the company in August. Pichette has been widely credited for engineering a cost-cutting effort that helped Google offset its slowing revenue growth.

George Reyes, Google's CFO before Pichette, received a 2008 bonus of \$675,000, down from \$1.68 million in 2007 when he was with the company the entire year.

Google's top executives are eligible for annual bonuses of up to \$6 million apiece.

ICANN President to Step Down

Paul Twomey, president and CEO of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) since March 2003, will step down at the end of the year, the organization announced Monday.

Twomey told the ICANN board he does not want to renew his contract for another three-year term, he said in an ICANN news release. Twomey announced his departure during an ICANN meeting in Mexico City.

His decision to leave comes as ICANN, the nonprofit organization created in 1998 to oversee the Internet's domain name system, is moving away from long-time ties with the U.S. government. ICANN's long-time memorandum of understanding with the U.S. Department of Commerce expires in September, and ICANN leaders have said they want to remove the perception that they are controlled by the U.S. government.

In recent years, several other countries have pushed for ICANN to sever its ties with the U.S. government. Some countries have pushed unsuccessfully to have the United Nations oversee ICANN.

ICANN is also in the middle of a controversial effort to allow the sale of more generic top level domains (gTLDs). In February, in response to several concerns brought up by the public and companies in the Internet industry, ICANN's projected time line for taking applications for new gTLDs slipped from September to December.

Several companies have complained that many new gTLDs would require them to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy domain names on those gTLDs to protect their brand names.

Before becoming president and CEO, Twomey served for four years as chairman of ICANN's Governmental Advisory Committee. Before joining ICANN, he was the founder of Argo Pacific, an international advisory and investment firm that helps companies build Internet and technology businesses.

He was formerly the CEO of the Australian National Office for the Information Economy, and he served as the Australian government's special adviser for the information economy and technology.

Several Internet leaders praised Twomey's efforts at ICANN. "During his tenure, ICANN has become a stronger organization and, as a key element of the Internet ecosystem, has ensured the security and stability of the domain name system," Lynn St. Amour, CEO of the Internet Society, said in a statement.

EU Ends Full-Time Monitoring of Microsoft

Microsoft got a reward for good behavior from European Union regulators on Wednesday when they ended close checks on the company's compliance with a 2004 antitrust order.

The European Commission said it no longer needed a full-time monitoring trustee to make sure Microsoft Corp. was obeying an EU order to share technical information with rivals that would help them make products compatible with Microsoft servers.

It said this was "in light of changes in Microsoft's behavior" and the possibility for rivals to take Microsoft before national courts if it didn't share information as agreed under a license program.

It said it would now rely on technical consultants when necessary.

The EU executive appointed computer science professor Neil Barrett in 2005 to assess data provided by Microsoft documents that he later judged as "unusable" as a manual for software engineers.

Microsoft has been working with antitrust regulators and software companies to improve the interoperability information the EU ordered it to share. In 2007, it lost a legal challenge to the EU order where it claimed that regulators had forced it to give intellectual property to rivals.

The company said it was committed to ensuring that it complied with EU law and would continue to cooperate with the European Commission and its experts.

Apple Expected To Announce New Mac Desktops

Apple is expected to unveil new Mac desktops soon. Rumors on World of Apple and My Apple Guide swirled over the weekend and continued Monday about updates to the Mac mini, the all-in-one iMac, and the Mac Pro.

Apple is expected to make the announcement of updates at a media event on March 24, similar to the event the Cupertino, Calif.-based company held last October to announce notebooks. Kodawarisan, a Japanese Web site, however, said the new Mac desktops will be announced Tuesday.

While updates for the Mac mini, iMac and Mac Pro were expected at Macworld in January, Apple didn't deliver. An anticipated change for the Mac Pro features Intel Nehalem processors.

Along with new desktops and adding the latest Nvidia graphics cards, Apple is expected to pull a rabbit out of a hat with a "pleasant surprise," sources said.

"Given that we haven't seen major updates to these products, it might be time for Apple to do a refresh," said Michael Gartenberg, vice president of strategy and analysis at Interpret.

The Mac mini hasn't had an update since 2007, and the iMac was last updated nearly a year ago. Changes to these Macs aren't expected to be

significant, but the Mac Pro is expected to include a major architecture change with the inclusion of the Nehalem (Core i7) processors.

Rumors also say there will more than just changes under the hood. A new design for the Mac Pro's aluminum casing is also expected.

While there have been no concrete announcements from Apple, the company also hasn't denied the rumors. In fact, new Apple marketing literature shows "high performance Nvidia graphics" as a feature in the iMac 20- and 24-inch products.

A photo has also surfaced online of a packaged Mac mini. The image, posted by OneMore Thing, shows the retail box of a Mini mac with ports for Ethernet, Mini DVI, Firewire 800, and a display port.

An announcement by Apple at the end of the month makes sense, considering Intel is also launching Nehalem processors at the end of the month.

As if the much-anticipated updates aren't enough, rumors have Apple offering a surprise. While some observers are speculating the surprise is an update to the iPhone, others think it will be an expected Apple TV update. The update might add TV programming from the iTunes Store, HD support, and DVR capabilities.

Microsoft Admits Windows 7 Will Be Able To Turn Off IE8

A Windows enthusiast blog has discovered that Internet Explorer 8 can be turned on or off in a recent Windows 7 build, and Microsoft is now admitting it.

The news of such divorce-ability between the browser and the operating system would be good news for regulatory agencies, especially the European Commission, which reportedly has been considering requiring such a split.

The AeroXperience blog found that, in Windows 7 build 7048, the dialog box for turning features on and off includes a checkbox for Internet Explorer 8. It did, however, note a catch.

"This only seems to wipe out the actual executable running Internet Explorer 8 (iexplore.exe)," writes blog author Bryant Zadegan, "but given that many of the most vocal proponents of choice were just looking for an option to functionally remove IE8, this might've been the only way to do it without killing the rest of Windows."

The blog notes that completing this removal requires two reboots and a configuration step, which might indicate that there's some kind of remapping for IE-related functions going on. Afterward, the blog writers said, the IE8 components are still present, but IE itself is missing from Set Program Defaults and there are no complaints from the system.

Some other observers, however, said this step doesn't remove IE8 completely, because it has become so interwoven with other parts of the Windows operating system that its complete removal is difficult, if not impossible.

The European Commission, prompted by an antitrust complaint from Opera Software, issued a "statement of objections" in January that pointed, in particular, to the inclusion of the Internet Explorer browser as part of the Windows OS. Microsoft has issued a statement on its blog to the effect that it will provide a response within the next couple of months and will have little to say before then.

In the meantime, Mozilla, creator of the Firefox browser, has also joined the complaint. IE's relationship to the Windows OS was a major issue in Microsoft's battle with the U.S. Department of Justice.

One ongoing question is whether the EC will require Microsoft to allow the complete removal of IE from Windows - whatever that means - or whether distribution of other browsers along with IE might suffice.

Microsoft is now implicitly acknowledging some level of ability to disable IE in the upcoming operating system. In its Windows 7 Engineering blog, a posting early Friday indicates that the release candidate will have the ability to "enable it or disable" an expanded list of features that now include Windows Media Player, Windows Search, and Internet Explorer 8.

Mark Margevicius, a research director at Gartner, agreed there is a question about what "removed" means. "If there are still components in, say, the registry," he asked, "is IE removed?"

This disabling in Windows 7, he said, doesn't appear to be functionally that different from earlier versions of Windows, "and Microsoft has never really admitted that IE is a separate app." The difference here, he said, is that Microsoft appears to be admitting that, in Windows 7, a user will be able to easily turn IE off.

Court Hears Appeal in Freelancers Case

The Supreme Court will consider reviving the \$18 million settlement of a dispute involving payment to freelance writers for use of their work online.

The settlement came in a class-action lawsuit filed by the freelancers against publishers and database companies. The 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New York had thrown the agreement out, but the high court on Monday agreed to hear an appeal of that decision.

The proposed settlement covers both freelancers who registered the copyright to their works and those who didn't. The appeals court said courts generally do not have authority over infringement claims on works that have not been copyrighted.

The lawsuit followed a Supreme Court ruling in 2001 that freelance writers have online rights to their work. The case largely applied to articles, photographs and illustrations that were produced 15 or more years ago, before freelance contracts provided for the material's electronic use.

The case is Reed Elsevier v. Pogebrin, 08-103.

Judge Kicks Notorious Spammer off Facebook

A federal judge in San Jose, California, has ordered convicted spammer Sanford Wallace to stay away from Facebook.

Facebook sued Wallace and two other men last week in an effort to cut down on spam and phishing schemes on the social-networking site. On Monday, Judge Jeremy Fogel of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California issued a temporary restraining order barring Wallace and two other alleged spammers, Adam Arzoomanian and Scott Shaw, from accessing Facebook's network.

In court filings, Facebook argues that these men gained access to legitimate Facebook accounts and then used them to spam the profile pages of the account holders' friends. Facebook allows users to post messages on the "Wall" of the profile pages of their friends.

The Facebook spam messages served two functions - they enticed users into visiting phishing Web sites where they could be tricked up into giving up their Facebook login credentials; they routed victims to commercial Web sites that paid the spammers for the traffic, Facebook said.

News of the lawsuit was first reported Friday by Inside Facebook, a Web site for Facebook developers.

Wallace is one of the country's most notorious spammers, with a career that dates back to the 1990s. Last May a federal judge found him and a partner guilty under the CAN-SPAM act and ordered them to pay US\$230 million for phishing and spamming MySpace users with links to gambling, ringtone and pornography Web sites.

Spammers and phishers have been hitting Facebook particularly hard over the past year and a half, said Dave Jevans, chairman of the Anti-Phishing Working Group. Because Facebook spam often looks like it comes from a friend it can be very effective. And because it's Web-based, it skirts traditional e-mail spam filtering tools, Jevans said.

"Some of the bigger guys can get a million people a day to look at their stuff," he said. "It's occasional, but you'll see it."

Spam is just one of several ills plaguing the social network. Over the past few days, Facebook users have also been hit with a new variant of the Koobface worm, which tries to trick victims into installing malicious software onto their PCs. Also, fake applications that send out messages such as "F a c e b o o k - closing down!!!" or "Error Check System" to try to trick victims into sending the messages to their friends have also been circulating around the social network.

Late last year, the judge in the Wallace case awarded Facebook a record US\$873 million in damages after Facebook accused other spammers of using stolen logins to pump out more than 4 million spam messages. Facebook says that it doesn't expect the spammers in that case to pay up, but the company hopes that it may serve as a deterrent.

Jevans agreed that lawsuits probably won't stop the big-time Facebook spammers, but he said they could deter the little guys.

Job-Offer Spam Gets Makeover for Recession

A staple of the spammer's arsenal - those come-ons for job offers - is getting a makeover because of the recession as online identity thieves concoct clever new ways to sneak onto people's computers.

One tactic the bad guys are trying is a twist on an old standby: e-mails purporting to come from legitimate companies that say they're still hiring.

The messages are loaded with links to the company's official Web site to throw off suspicious recipients. However, they are also packed with a dangerous surprise - a computer virus - hidden in an attachment that is supposed to be a job application.

One message, supposedly from Coca-Cola Co., trumpets that "We are hiring!" All the recipient has to do is fill out the attached application to get started.

There are some tip-offs, though, that the message is fraudulent: the English is choppy, the company promises 12 weeks of paid vacation and that "None of the positions require any kind of education or work experience!"

Another tactic represents the flip side of that deception. Spammers are sending e-mails pretending to reject people for jobs, instead of trying to recruit them. Those messages say the recipients weren't selected for a particular job, so the company has sent back their application - disguising the malicious program.

"What they're trying to tap into is human curiosity," said Dermot Harnett, principal analyst of anti-spam engineering with Symantec Corp. "Maybe people have lost their jobs, or they're looking for another job, and they're looking at their e-mail constantly to see if they have responses from potential employers."

The Federal Trade Commission is also warning about a spate of economic-stimulus scams - spam messages promising stimulus money simply by revealing bank account or credit card numbers.

One way to protect yourself is by never clicking on links or opening e-mail attachments from people you don't know. If you're a jobseeker who gets one of these messages, contact the company's human resources department yourself to follow up on an application or to make sure a job opening exists.

And don't rely on the sender's e-mail address either as proof that the message is coming from a legitimate source. Hackers can easily spoof those.

Visa, Microsoft Join EU Fight Against Internet Child Porn

A new coalition of police, Internet providers, financial groups and NGOs was launched Tuesday to tackle the growing flow of child abuse pictures distributed online, the EU commission announced.

The European Financial Coalition (EFC) - led by Britain's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) and including MasterCard, Microsoft, PayPal, VISA Europe and the NGO Missing Children Europe - will work together in the fight against child abuse images.

On the law enforcement side, the EFC founding members also include Europol and the Italian National Postal and Communication Police.

"It is a reality that the rapid growth of the Internet has opened up a serious criminal market for images of child sex abuse," said EU Justice Commissioner Jacques Barrot.

"The European Financial Coalition will help identify and protect victims, and, above all, confiscate the profits from these criminal activities," he added.

However the EU's executive arm is still seeking more partners, including European nations, to join the anti-child porn coalition.

The European Commission will provide up to 427,000 euros (537,000 dollars) in funding for the new coalition which was officially launched by Barrot and others on Tuesday at the London headquarters of CEOP.

"By applying the individual lessons learnt and by coming together with our combined skills, focusing on collective objectives, we plan to eradicate the remnants of that industry once and for all," CEOP chief executive Jim Gamble said on the organisation's website.

Internet Seen A Growing Weapon in Asian Radicalization

Extremist groups in Southeast Asia are increasingly using the internet and social networking to radicalize the youth of the region, said a new security report released Friday.

Internet usage in Southeast Asia has exploded since 2000 and extremist groups have developed a sophisticated online presence, including professional media units.

"For extremist groups in our region, the internet is an increasingly important tool for recruitment to violence," said the report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies in Singapore.

"Importantly, they aren't attacking only the West, but are drawing on their narrative to attack the governance arrangements of regional states," said the report titled "Countering internet radicalization in Southeast Asia" (www.aspi.org.au/).

The report said online extremism first appeared in Southeast Asia in early 2000, particularly in the Bahasa Indonesia and Malay language cyber-environment.

Since then internet usage in the region has exploded and so too have extremist websites, chat rooms and blogs.

The number of radical and extremist websites in Bahasa and Malay rose from 15 in 2007 to 117 in 2008. Of those, sympathetic websites rose from

10 to 16 and sympathetic blogs and social networking rose from zero to 82.

Between 2006 and July 2007, radical regional websites have disseminated al-Qaeda and Southeast Asian militant group Jemaah Islamiah propaganda videos, pictures and statements, it said.

In Indonesia, which has battled extremist Muslim groups responsible for bombings, internet usage rose from 2 million in 2000 to 20 million in January 2008.

The country now represents 80 to 90 percent of visitors to 10 radical and extremist websites in the region, said the report.

The Philippines, which has a Muslim insurgency, has seen internet usage rise to 14 million from 2 million in 2000, Malaysia 14.9 million from 3.7 million and Thailand 8.5 million from 2.3 million in the same period.

"The Bahasa and Malay language websites include sites manned by radical and extremist groups, Islamic boarding schools (pesantrens), and groups of individuals who sympathize with and support the ideology of violent jihad," said the report.

One of the first appearances of a "tradercraft manual" was in August 2007 in the then forum, Jihad al-Firdaus. The forum had a section on electronic jihad, including several hacking manuals. In 2008 the region's first sophisticated bomb-making manual and bomb-making video were posted on the Forum Al-Tawbah, which is registered in Shah Alam, Selangor and Malaysia, said the report.

But it said there had been no serious attempt to plan militant operations in these forums, adding further details of their activities were in private messages or personal emails.

Extremists were using a variety of technology to spread their message. "Blogs and personal social networking accounts provided more than half of the increase in 2008," said the report.

Militant groups have also become internet media savvy.

The Mujahidin Syura Council, an extremist group that claims to operate in southern Thailand, launched an official media wing in July 2008 as a blog on Google, said the report.

The Khattab Media Publication's blog is mainly written in Malay and was used to announce the start of a new military campaign, codenamed Operation Tawbah (Operation Repentance).

Another group, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, often produces high-quality videos of its activities and uploads them onto YouTube. Many of the videos focus on the failings of the Indonesian government and the need to implement sharia law and establish an Islamic caliphate, said the report.

"Extremist groups without access to mainstream media place great value on having online media units to boost their reputations and recruit people via the internet," it said.

The report said that regional governments had done little to stop the rise of online radicalization, partly because attempts to regulate cyberspace have been a political minefield.

It said while websites inciting violence are subject to criminal laws in some countries, there are often no specific regulations covering the internet.

"Some governments don't want to appear un-Islamic by coming down hard on Islamist groups, and some don't want to appear undemocratic by seeming to rein in freedom of expression in cyberspace," it said.

"The problem of online radicalization crosses national borders and will require a concerted international response."

German Twenty-Somethings Prefer Internet to Partner

German twenty-somethings would ditch their spouses and do without a car in a heartbeat if they had to choose between having them or Internet access or a mobile phone, according to an industry study.

In a survey by German broadband association Bitkom around 84 percent of respondents aged 19-29 said they would rather do without their current partner or an automobile than forego their connection to the Web.

Living without a mobile phone was also unthinkable for 97 percent of those questioned in that age range.

Nevertheless, Bitkom president August-Wilhelm Scheer said on Monday in Hanover that did not mean that "the Web is an anonymous medium that leads to social indifference."

One of the main themes at this year's annual tech trade fair CeBit in Hanover is what the organizers have dubbed "Webciety," short for WorldWideWeb society.

Bitkom said 1,000 people had taken part in the survey, and one in two people said they had made new friends thanks to chat forums and Internet communities. Around 8 percent said they had found a new partner thanks to online relations.

"The Web creates real relationships and does not result in autism and dehumanization," said Scheer, who admitted he gets nervous when he does not have Internet access while on vacation.

Still, Scheer said, there was a digital divide in Germany that needed to be bridged.

"There's a gap and it's not with 30-year-olds or 40-year-olds it's with those 50 years of age and above," Scheer said.

The way people in their forties and those in their twenties used the Web did not differ much, Scheer said, but the difference to someone in their mid-fifties was significant.

"One of the main challenges in society today is to ensure that all age groups are up to par when it comes to the Internet," Scheer said.

One in Three UK Youngsters A Cyber-Bullying Victim

One in three young Britons have been the victims of cyber-bullying with girls the most likely victims, according to research published on Tuesday.

A survey by the Beatbullying charity of more than 2,000 youngsters aged 11 to 18 said text messages, prank mobile phone calls and content posted on social networking sites were at the heart of a "growing epidemic."

Teenage girls were four times more likely to be bullied this way than boys, the research found.

"Clearly, cyber-bullying is a growing problem affecting millions of children across the UK and to date efforts to tackle the epidemic have fallen short," said Emma Jane Cross, the charity's chief executive.

The findings coincide with the launch of a new nationwide social networking site CyberMentors, backed by celebrities and politicians such as Prime Minister Gordon Brown, which allows trained schoolchildren to provide help and advice for their peers.

"CyberMentors is an exciting new initiative to help keep Britain's children and young people safe online," Brown said.

"Just as we wouldn't let them go unsupervised in playgrounds or in youth clubs, so we must put in place the measures that we need to keep our children and young people safe online."

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